

Comments on media trends in South Africa based on AMPS 1976-1980

Thomas Oosthuizen

Department of Communications
University of the Orange Free State
Bloemfontein

Abstract

In this article, which is based on data obtained from the annual AMPS projects of the SAARF, media trends in South Africa is commented on. It is observed that while the media use among the Coloureds, Whites and Asians is declining (all media except television), blacks show an overall increase in media use. This trend is observed in daily newspaper reading (although there was a slight decrease for blacks in the last year), radio listening, television viewing and cinema attendance, even though it is slight in instances. These trends suggest that reasons have to be determined for the increasing alienation between die media and sectors of the population. In a country where most media are primarily aimed at the whites, these trends also stress the need for media which will serve the interests of blacks.

South Africa is experiencing a rapid population growth at present. The population growth for the different race groups in South Africa for the period 1951 to 1970 was as follows: Whites 1,89; Coloureds 3,32; Asians 2,88 and Blacks 3,12 (among the rural blacks this is even more pronounced) per cent per year. Although South Africa is the most industrialized country on the African continent, a large section of its population is still in a transitory phase of development from a traditional to a modern society. In 1904 29,2 per cent of the black population lived in cities. In 1970 this figure was already 48,7 per cent.

Numerous studies have indicated that media use is largely dependent on variables such as population growth, level of education (literacy) and personal income (Samuelson, Carter & Ruggles, 1963; Schramm & White, 1960; Turpin, 1974). According to Lerner (1966) media require a basic infra-structure to develop, which in turn leads to higher literacy, and an increase in the demand for media. Population growth without an infra-structure could thus lead to a decrease in literacy. The literacy levels in South Africa for 1960 and 1970 were as follows: 1960: 39,5 per cent and in 1970: 49,4 per cent. As the cities in South Africa have this basic infra-structure, Lerner's model would be applicable to South Africa. This infra-structure in turn is dependent on a sound economic foundation. This should illustrate the interdependence of these factors rather than a simple linear casual relationship.

It could thus be interesting to see how the former factors have affected media usage patterns in South Africa over the past years. The following comparisons on media use were drawn from the SAARF publication, *AMPS Trends 1976-1980*. In all cases the averages of the exposure percentages were taken. In some cases a median would have been more descriptive however, as it accounts for large differences in percentages between individual media exposures.

Media use

Newspapers

Table 1
Reading of dailies

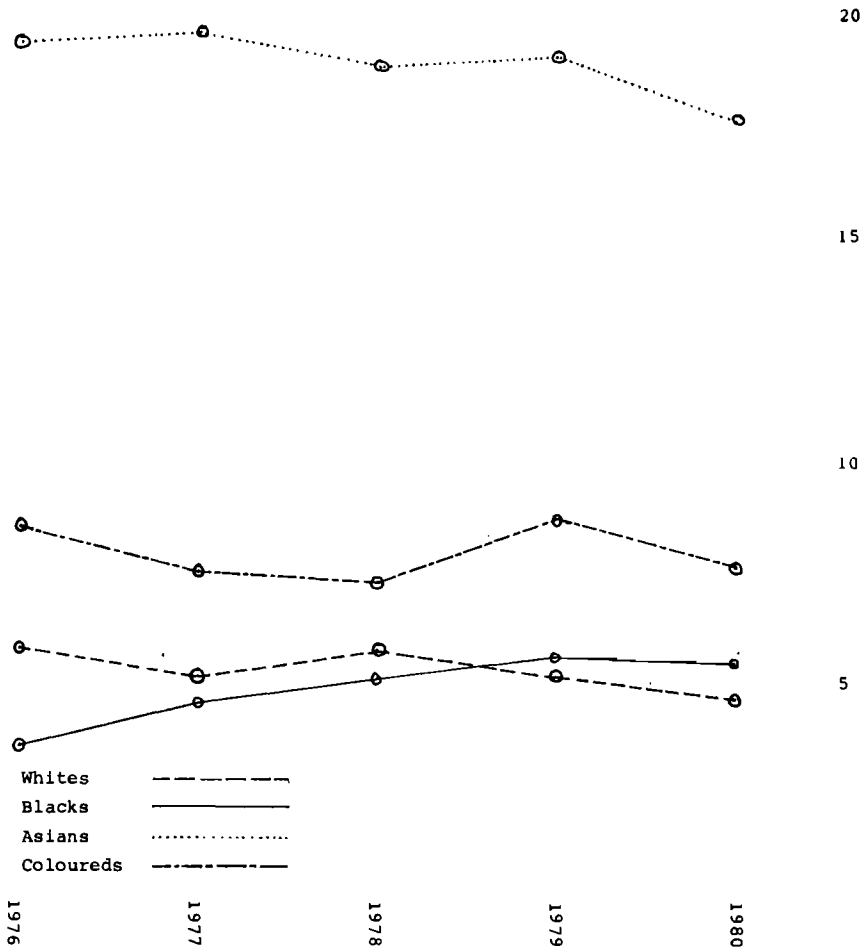


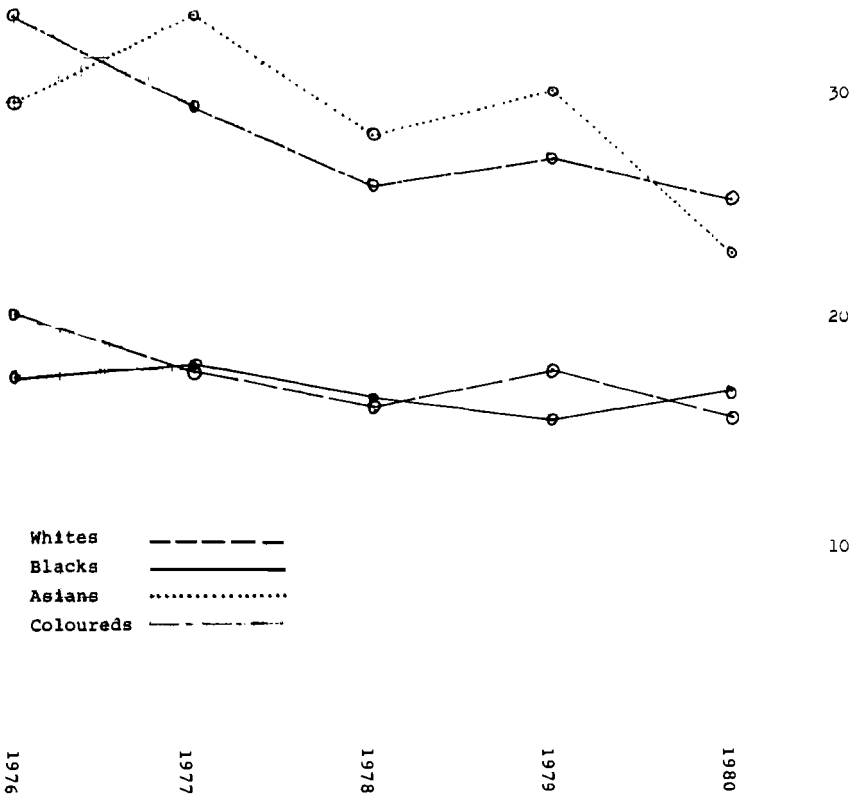
Figure 1 reflects data for English dailies only and indicates a definite decline in the overall reading of dailies, especially among the whites (by 18,9 per cent) and Asians (by 8,8 per cent).

(Among the whites, the readership — copies read or paged through (AMPS, 1980) — of Afrikaans dailies have decreased from 7,15 per cent in 1976 to 5,97 per cent in 1980). The blacks, however, according to Fig. 1, show an increase in the reading of dailies (by 50,9 per cent), which clearly indicates a demand for more newspapers. *Post*, a black daily (*since defunct*), accounts for much of the increase since 1978. This increase may also be due to blacks becoming more politically active. The percentage illiteracy is also decreasing fast.

Table 2

Radio listening

40



Among whites the most significant decreases were among *The Star*, *Rand Daily Mail*, *Cape Times*, and *Argus*. The decline is evenly spread over publications for the coloureds. With the Asians a decrease is found in the readership of *Daily News*, *Natal Mercury*, and increases in *Natal Witness* and *The Star*.

Radio

Access to the radio is relatively unrestricted if compared to the other media: a transistor set can be bought at a relatively low price; no electricity or special skills are needed for using a radio; etc. Overall radio use in South Africa shows a steady decline (by 20,3 per cent) however. Listening among blacks shows a slight increase in the last year, which correspond with their overall increase in media use. "Springbok Radio" and the regional services account for most of this decline. After the advent of television the radio seems to be used for purposes for which it is especially suited e.g. Maas (1975).

Television

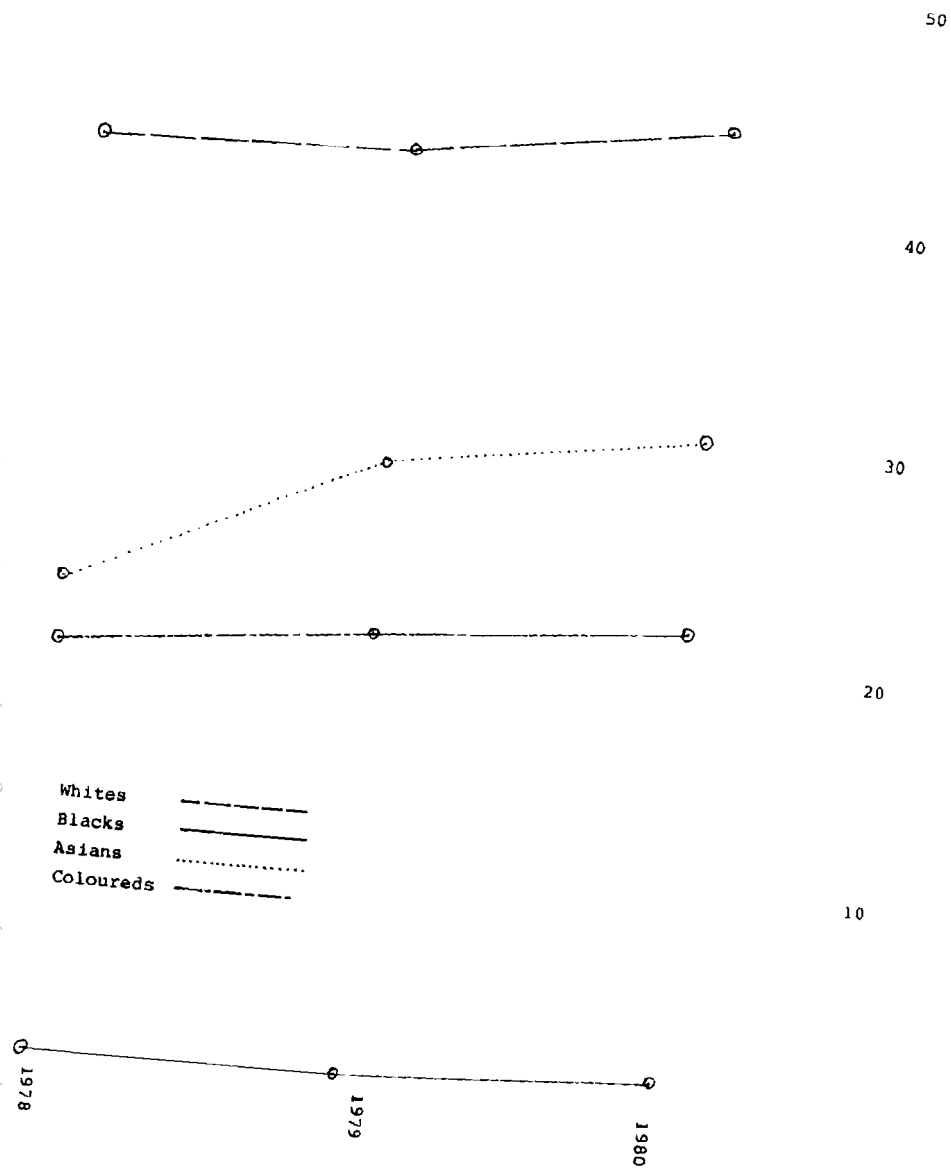
Data on television are only available from 1978, when television started with commercials. Television viewing shows a rapid increase among all population groups. Although the overall viewing level of blacks is low, there is an increase of 112,6 per cent in their viewing, which is far greater than that for the whites (5,6 per cent). This may be a result of the electrification of the black townships, and especially a higher mean income level. After the initial investment is made, it is also quite cheap to run a television set. The overall viewing level of blacks stay low however, which might be a result of the low profile of blacks on television. The introduction of TV2 and TV3 may bring about interesting changes. World-of-mouth also plays a dominant part in spreading news among the black people (Deppe, 1976; Greenberg & Dervin, 1970).

Cinema

It is usually claimed that television has killed the cinema. A few years after the introduction of television, however, cinema usually stabilizes at a lower attendance level (Belson, 1967). Other factors also influence cinema attendance though (e.g. the availability of theatres, the quality of movies, etc.).

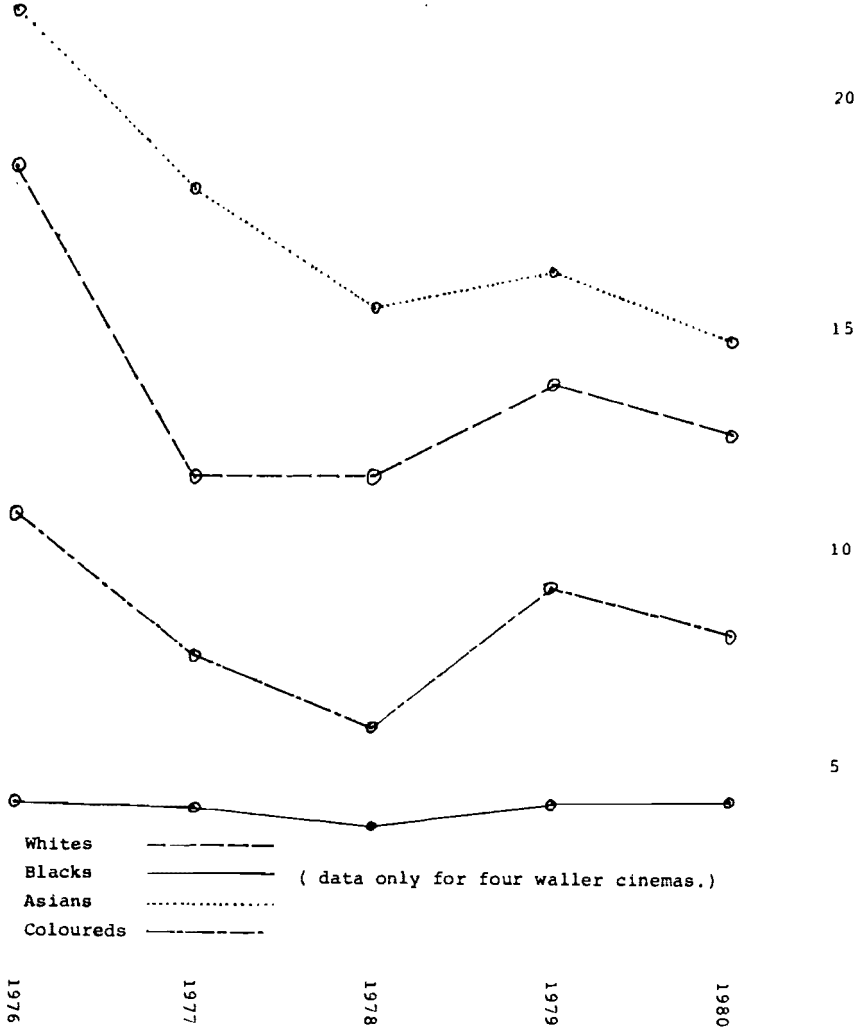
As is evident from figure 4, for whites cinema attendance decreased by 31,8 per cent in the past five years. The lack of black cinemas explain their low attendance levels, although the attendance level seems to be stable. The overall low level may also be due to the mostly stereotyped (*villain*) rôle that blacks play in most movies — they see a world in which they have no part (Barcus, 1977).

Table 3
Television viewing



Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2010).

Table 4
Cinema attendance



Conclusion

The fact that blacks are becoming more media concious than the other population groups, stresses the need for media which serve the interests of the blacks. Bogart (1972) indicated that as a result of the urbanization of blacks in the US, the cities change their composition

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2010).

before the media, if interested, can adjust. The blacks are then alienated from the white establishment media. This may hold true for South Africa, where all the major black media are controlled or owned by whites. Added to this, many blacks live in rural areas where they have no access to newspapers or cinemas.

The lower level of media use (except television) for the other groups, show an increased alienation between media and population which should be investigated. This could have had interesting implications for the Steyn Commission of Inquiry into the mass media.

References

- Barcus, F.E. & Wolkin, R. (1977) *Children's Television: An Analysis of Programming and Advertising*. New York: Praeger.
- Belson, W.A. (1967) *The Impact of Television*. Hamden: Archon Books.
- Bogart, L. (1972) Negro and White Media Exposure: New Evidence. *Journalism Quarterly*, 49, 15-21.
- Deppe, R. (1976) World of Mouth Advertising. *Marketing Research and Media*. 1 (3), 9-16.
- Greenberg, B. & Dervin, B. (1977) Mass Communication Among the Urban Poor. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 34, 224-235.
- Lerner, D. (1966) Communication Systems and Social Systems: A Statistical Exploration in History and Policy. In Smith, A.G. *Communication and Culture*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Maas, I. (1975) *Die Invloed van Televisie op die Radio: 'n Literatuuroor-sig*. Pretoria: Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing.
- Samuelson, M., Carter, R.F. & Ruggles, L. (1963) Education, Available Time and Use of Mass Media. *Journalism Quarterly*, 40, 491-496.
- Schramm, W. & White, D.M. (1960) Education and Economic Status in Newspaper Reading. In Schramm, W. (Ed.) *Mass Communication*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Turpin, W.H. (1974) Newspaper Circulation and Rise in Personal Income. *Journalism Quarterly*, 51, 522-525.
- South African Advertising Research Foundation. *AMPS 1976*. Sandton City.
- South African Advertising Research Foundation. *AMPS 1980*. Sandton City.
- South African Advertising Research Foundation. *AMPS Trends 1976-1980*. Sandton City.
- South African Statistics* (1980). Pretoria: Dept. of Statistics.

Communication 81

On 24 and 25 September 1981 the Fifth Annual Congress of the Southern African Communication Association will be held in Bloemfontein. The theme of the congress, which will this year be hosted by the Department of Communications of the University of the Orange Free State, is *Intercultural Communication*. A wide variety of papers on aspects of intercultural communication will be read by speakers from academic institutions as well as the different industrial sectors.

The following are some of the subjects that will be covered:

- The importance of intercultural communication in national development.
- Implications of intercultural communication for the mass media.
- Intercultural communications in labour relations.

Workshops will be conducted on *Negotiations and bargaining in industry* and *Industrial journalism in intercultural situations*.

The congress will be opened by Prof. W.L. Mouton, Rector of the University of the Orange Free State and Chairman of the Board of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Dr P.G.J. Koornhof, Minister of Cooperation and Development, will be the guest speaker at the annual dinner.

Further information can be obtained from the Secretary in Bloemfontein. Telephone (051) 70711 x 317. Address: Department of Communication, P O Box 339, Bloemfontein, 9300.

Kommunikasie 81

Op 24 en 25 September 1981 word die Vyfde Jaarkongres van die Suider-Afrikaanse Kommunikasievereniging in Bloemfontein gehou. Die tema van die kongres, wat vanjaar deur die Departement Kommunikasiekunde aan die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat aangebied word, is *Interkulturele Kommunikasie*. 'n Wye verskeidenheid van referate oor aspekte van interkulturele kommunikasie word deur sprekers uit die akademie en die verskillende bedryfsektore gelewer.

Die volgende is sommige van die onderwerpe wat onder andere behandel word:

- Die rol van interkulturele kommunikasie in nasionale ontwikkeling.
- Implikasies van interkulturele kommunikasie vir die massamedia.
- Interkulturele kommunikasie in die veld van arbeidsverhoudinge.
- Teologiese kommunikasie in interkulturele perspektief.

Die kongres word geopen deur prof. W.L. Mouton, Rektor van die UOVS en Voorsitter van die SAUK-Raad. Sy Edele dr. P.G.J. Koornhof, Minister van Samewerking en Ontwikkeling, tree tydens die kongresdinee as gasspreker op.

Nadere inligting kan verkry word van die sekretariaat in Bloemfontein, telefoon (051) 70711 x 317. Adres: Departement Kommunikasiekunde, Posbus 339, Bloemfontein 9300.